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SPECIAL ISSUE ON ARTS AND JUSTICE

Edited by
Sarah Armstrong and Kirsten Sams

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on Inspiring Change

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on the Easterhouse Project

Kath Murray
on Stop and Search in Scotland



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MUSIC IN SCOTTISH PRISONS:

A NEW DIRECTION?

Kirstin Anderson



Participants, Inspiring Change, National Youth Choir of Scotland, HMP YOI Polmont

ONCE VIEWED as a 'harmless' activity for prisoners to pass the time, the role of music in prisons is now recognised as a practice whereby prisoners can engage in stimulating, creative project-based initiatives where they can develop various skills that often act as a catalyst for personal change (Clements 2004, p. 170; Van de Wall 1936, p. 142). Music is used in Scottish prisons in a variety of ways and in different spaces. Formal classes in music are offered in many Scottish prisons through the Learning Centres and can include group and individual and group lessons in playing instruments (mostly percussion and string instruments), using music composition programmes (i.e. Garageband) and singing and listening to music. In addition to the Learning Centre, music can also be played in other spaces such as the Links Centre and in prisoner's individual cells (Anderson 2011).

Miles and Clarke (2006, p. 5) found that "arts interventions in prisons and resettlement are particularly good at fostering the kinds of personal and social resources that open avenues to further learning and underpin attitudinal and behavioural change". Playing music in a group is an activity that takes trust, communication and a sense of humour, giving prisoners the opportunity to interact socially (Digard, Graf von Sponeck and Liebling, 2007). The experience of participating in a music project is not only a potentially enriching one, but it can also present a vital opportunity for prisoners to develop social and personal skills that they can use in other areas of their lives in prison and once they are released. Further work

is needed to explore how music can play a role in the development of relationships between prisoners and prison staff (and prisoners and their families) and act as a catalyst for developing a more positive prison environment.

A small-scale survey carried out with Learning Centre managers in Scottish prisons in 2008 showed that every prison in Scotland has offered some type of musical activity for prisoners at some point since their inception (Anderson 2011). There are two ways in which organised music activity or programmes can be found in Scottish prisons currently: 1) music is offered as part of the education curriculum by a contracted education provider or 2) the prison service hires outside organisations, mostly charitable or independent groups, to come into the prison to provide music projects for a specific amount of time. Contracted education providers have also hired outside organisations to run programmes in conjunction with their own programme delivery.

Two of the most striking findings to come out of this work are that most music tutors who work in prisons have no formal training and development to support such work in a specific closed environment, and further, that there is no support network in place for this unique group of music tutors and practitioners to collaborate and develop new skills together, challenges that are still present in 2014. Additionally, there is still a lost opportunity for collaboration between music tutors based within the prison education centres (or Learning Centres as they are called in Scotland) and outside practitioners and organisations. Vox Liminis, a new organisation founded by Alison Urie in 2013, is making strides

towards collaboration with New College Lanarkshire (which provides education in half of Scotland's prisons) and the Scottish Prison Service (more on p.23). SPS has recently outlined its vision for substantial organisational change, and the work of Vox Liminis is an example of the type of innovative projects which will be necessary to support this change and enhance Scotland's reputation for innovative opportunities for prisoners and prison staff through arts engagement.

Anderson, K. (2011) Unpublished Thesis, *Music Education and Experience in Scottish Prisons*.

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Van de Wall, W. (1936) *Music in Institutions*. New York: Russel Sage Foundation.

Vox Liminis www.voxliminis.co.uk

Kirstin Anderson is a researcher with the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research. Her focus is on arts in prisons, and training and development for staff, teachers and arts practitioners working in prisons.



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